The event that provided the initial impetus for the writing of this poem, which eventually became one of my longest literary productions, was a dream that was so remarkably vivid that I got up in the middle of the night and scribbled down the notes that would come to provide the compositional starting point.

The poem is written entirely in iambic pentameter – or that was my intention.

Abandoned, But Not Dead: A Nightly Meditation on the Virtues

By Edmund Schilvold
November 2009 – February 2010

A**bove** a **vast** ex**panse** of **twi**light **green –**
A**bove**, a**bove**, a**bove** the **mu**ted **fields**,
A **thou**sand **scar**let **ten**drils **lace** the **sky**,
And **deep**, un**yield**ing **blue** flows **through** my **eyes –**

Be**low** the **fie**ry **sky** of **dy**ing **day**,
I **walk** an **an**cient **land** I **seem** to **know**;
I **move** my **feet** a**mongst** the **brood**ing **shapes**
Of **ru**ined **halls** and **col**umns, **arch**es, **gates** –
Burned and **mang**led **by** the **call**ous **flames**
Of **Time**, of **ag**es, **of** de**spair** and **hope –**
Of **years**, of **spring** and **fall**, of **peace** and **war** –
Burned, so that **on**ly **fee**ble **sem**blance **tells**
Of **what** these **grave** and **wa**sted **forms** once **were**.

And **strange**ly, **they** a**rouse** in **me** a **call** –
Which **can** be **noth**ing, **I** keep **thin**king, **but**
The **tre**mor **of** for**gott**en, **dis**tant **days**,
Not **quite** for**gott**en or a**band**oned **aft**er **all** –
But **I** am **in** a **dream**, that **much** is **clear**,
And **so**, how **can** it **be** that **I** am **here**
A**wake** and **think**ing, **know**ing **I** ar**rived**
Through **sleep**, through **thought**, through **gate**ways **of** the **mind**?

A **help**less **vic**tim **of** ab**sorb**ing **spells**
Is **what** the **drea**mer **all** too **oft**en **is**;
He **is** un**con**scious **of** his **po**tent **sleep** –
But **I**, I **walk** a **dream**, and **know** I **lie**
Up**on** a **bed**, and **yet**, the **dream** seems **true**,
As **true** as **an**y **place** con**tained** with**in**
The **gripp**ing **dream** we **call** the **re**al **world**.

*

I **tread** a **road** which **bore** the **bru**tal **weight**
Of **hor**ses, **wheels** and **march**ing **leath**er **shoes**,
But **Time**, it **could** not **bear**; and **now** re**main**
But **frac**tured **slabs** up**on** the **liv**ing **soil**;
They **seem** to **ver**i**fy** an **an**cient **truth** –
Al**though** un**will**ing**ly** and **not** with **words –**
That **on**ly **Life** can **bear** the **weight** of **Time**,
And **that** un-**liv**ing **things** must **al**ways **pass**.
And **I** would **add** that **ev**en **things** that **live**
May **be** re**vealed** as **life**less **when** they **die**.

My **thirst** for **deep**er **know**ledge **drives** me **on –**

I **want** to **know** the **na**ture **of** the **world**
That **sudd**en**ly**, I **am** sur**roun**ded **by** –
I **strive** to **bett**er **see** its **ma**ny **parts**;
The **sil**hou**ett**ed **ru**ins **and** the **fields**,
The **dis**tant **mirr**or **where** the **day** still **bleeds** –

But the **twi**light **thick**ens **as** I **move**,
And **dark**, fore**bod**ing **all**eys **scream** of **death**
Un**to** my **worr**ied, **strai**ning **black**ened **eyes** –
I **long** to **find** the **ker**nel **which** would **speak**
To **that** in **me** which **lives** a **light**-year **from**
The **sur**face **that** the **rain**-filled **ponds** re**flect –**
“Probe **deep**, probe **far**!” my **un**known **fath**er **said**,
“Cre**ate** by **find**ing **matt**er **yet** un**seen**!”
I **try** to **live** the **words**; to **give** them **life**,
And **to** o**bey** this **max**im **from** the **past**:
“Let **year**ning **be** your **lord**, and **you** shall **live**;
Re**ject** the **holl**ow **off**ers **of** the **safe**,
And **of** con**tent**ment **and** per**sua**sive **calm**,
And **heed** the **deep**est **thirst**, and **not** your **fear**,
For **sa**fety **and** the **well**-trod, **ea**sy **way**
Will **bring** you **on**ly **pain** and **last**ing **loss**.”

*

Is **some**one **hear**ing **ev**ery **thought** I **think**?
Is **some**one **see**ing **and** re**spond**ing **to**
The **streams** of **pic**tures **in** my **inn**er **space**?
And **can** there **be** an **in**de**pen**dent **thought**
With**in** the **thought** that **is** this **viv**id **dream**?

I **won**der, **for** in**side** the **gloom** I **see**
A **lu**mi**nous** and **oth**er**world**ly **white**,
Where **re**cent**ly**, I **on**ly **could** di**scern**
Un**seen** vi**bra**tions **in** a **na**ked **black**.
The **an**swer **seems** to **be** af**fir**ma**tive**,
For **in**tu**it**ion **tells** me **that** the **white**
Ap**peared** be**cause** I **ask** of **the** un**known**
An **an**swer **to** the **ridd**le **of** this **dream**.

I **halt** my **steps** and **stare**, en**tranced**, a**mazed**;
What **shines** so **soft**ly **and** with **such** al**lure**?

It **could** be **moon**light **beam**ing **on**to **stone**;
It **is** that **faint** to **sight**, al**though** it **glows**
With **hope** and **strange** ap**peal** with**in** my **mind**,
But **no** white **moon** has **ris**en **in** the **sky**;
The **stars** a**lone** break **up** the **dark** a**bove**.

I **must** draw **near**er **if** I **want** to **know**,
And **though** I **fear** the **brood**ing **shapes** that **guard**
The **all**ey **where** the **sil**ver **glow** re**sides**,
I **force** the **tim**id **part** of **what** is **me**
To **close** its **rant**ing **mouth** and **let** me **go**;
I **walk** to**wards** the **white** and **quick**ly **close**,
And **now** I **see** what **form** is **bathed** in **light**:
A **face** of **mar**ble, **fine**ly, **deft**ly **carved**;
A **hum**ble **man** at **rest**, with **eye**lids **closed**;
The **coun**ten**ance** of **tran**quil **thought** –
“How **skilled** the **sculp**tor **must** have **been**,” I **think** –
I **stare** in **awe** at **stone** with **hu**man **form**,
And **as** I **stare**, I **feel** that **more** than **peace** e**mits**

From **where** I **see** that **face** of **sil**ken **rock –**
He **seems** to **live** and **think**, and **think** of – **me**!

Sur**pris**ing **words** re**sound** with**in** my **head –**
Are **they** my **own**, or **do** they **come** – from **him**?
Have **I** gone **mad**, to **be** en**thralled** by **stone**?

“I **have** been **wait**ing **for** the **long**est **time**
For **you** to **find** me **here**, in**side** your **space**,
In**side** the **end**less **place** you **have** with**in**
The **vio**let **flame** that **is** your **eld**est **self**.”

“**Who** are **you**, and **why** am **I** now **here**?” I **ask**,
And **look** a**round**, em**barr**assed **by** my **act**,
Worried **that** I **am** in **some** weird **game**,
Being **tricked** to **do** most **sill**y **deeds**.

But **there** is **on**ly **dark**, “I **am** a**lone**,”
I **tell** my**self**, al**though** I **feel** ob**served**
By **count**less **peer**ing **eyes** be**hind** my **back**;
“I **am** a**lone** with **this** per**plex**ing **stone**.”

And **then**, un**can**ny, **sil**ent **words** re**turn**,
En**gen**dered **by** a **voice**, I **think**, a **voice**
Of **such** a **kind** as **would** be **heard** if **speech**
Were **stripped** of **words**, and **still** were **co**gent **speech**;
A **word**less **lang**uage; **lin**go **of** pure **thought**;
Not **thought** forced **in**to **words** and **giv**en **shape**
By **sounds** – no, **liv**ing, **pri**mal **thought**,
The **Word** be**fore** a **word** was **ev**er **said**.

“I **am** the **Guar**di**an** of **High** I**deas**,
The **Sen**ti**nel** of **True** and **Lof**ty **Thought** –
An **archan**gel, were **I** to **use** a **term**
The **peo**ple **at** the **plane** you **come** from **know** –
But re**mem**ber – **ev**en **splen**did **words**
Are **mere**ly **sym**bols, **and** no **sym**bols **are**
I**den**ti**cal** to **what** they **sym**bo**lize –**
Which is **not** to **say** that **sym**bols **lie –**
They **are** like **babes suck**ling their **moth**er’s **breast**,
But **if** you **el**e**vate** a **sym**bol **to**
The **state** of **gol**den **truth** with**in** your **mind**
Then **you** have **fall**en **to** the **state** of **sin**.”

I **feel** a **ting**ling **in** my **strai**ning **eyes**;
The **tears** of **fear** and **won**der **wait** there**in**,
I **draw** my **breath** to **fill** my **emp**ty **lungs** –
“**Did** that **sculp**ted **stone** just **speak** to **me**?”
“Or **am** I **ev**en **madd**er **than** I **think**?”

“In**deed**, I **speak** un**to** you, **and** I **am**
As **re**al **and** as **liv**ing **as** a **man** –
In **fact**, more **so** than **an**y **sen**tient **form**
The **less**er **sun** has **ev**er **shone** up**on**.”

A**stoun**ded **and** in **awe**, I **hear** these **words**
Re**ver**be**rate** with**in** my **sec**ret **core**;
A **part** of **me** is **fear**ful **and** would **run**,
But the **bra**ver **part** wins **out –** I **stay**
And **hear**ken **to** the **loud** and **sil**ent **voice**,
Which, if **made** of **matt**er, **sure**ly **would**
Ap**pear** as **glist**ening **mar**ble **to** the **eye**.

“**Be** not a**fraid**, be**lov**ed **soul**, be**lov**ed **son**;
For **fear** is **on**ly **jus**ti**fied** by **fear** –
I **brought** you **here** to **show** you **what** I **guard**;
To **give** you **grea**ter **wis**dom **and** a **goal**;
The **high**er **pur**pose **ev**ery **be**ing **craves**,
Even **when** it **shuns** the **sa**cred **truth**,
Or **lives** in **cold** de**ni**al **of** the **clues**
To **what** the **world** of **matt**er **rea**lly **is**.

Now **look** a**round** with **care**, and **you** will **find**
The **bless**ed **chil**dren **I** was **set** to **watch**,
And **you** will **know** their **hall**owed **names** up**on**
Your **gaz**ing **at** the **forms** your **mind** pro**vides**
When **meet**ing **with** their **ess**ence **and** their **charm**.
And **when** a **name** ar**rives**, then **speak** that **name**,
And **that** which **bears** the **name** will **speak** to **you**.

I **have** no **fur**ther **wish**es **to** ex**press**,
You **may** de**cide** to **leave**, you **may** move **on**,
No **hope** of **ours** is **on** a **soul** en**forced**,
Your **will** is **free** to **sow** de**ci**sive **deeds**.”

I **list**en **keen**ly, **and** then **mar**vel, **for**
As **soon** as **those** ju**di**cious **words** are **said**,
The **peace**ful **face** is **gone**, and **so** the **glow**,
And **all** I **see** is **some**thing **coarse** and **old**,
A **dark** and **lich**en-**cov**ered **Gre**cian **bust**,
Terri**bly** er**o**ded **by** its **age**.

I **feel** a**ban**doned, **and** de**spair** ar**rives**

As **sting**ing **ten**tac**les** in**side** my **veins**;
I **pray** for **cour**age **to** the **Son** of **Light**,
And **leave** the **all**ey**way** and **wan**der **on**,
Gazing **anx**ious**ly** in**to** the **dark**,
In**to** a **haze** which **seems** to **cov**er **all**,
Worried **that** I **sudd**en**ly** will **see**
The **eyes** of **some**thing **aw**ful **and** in**sane**.

*

I **speak** the **name** of **Christ** a **doz**en **times**,
I **cannot** not **help** it, **for** I **trem**ble **so**,
But **then**, out **of** the **void**, a **light** ap**pears**;
A **faint** and **mu**ted **light**, but **yes**, a **light** –
A **bea**con, **shin**ing **through** a **sea** of **black**,
A **lu**mi**nous** and **oth**er**world**ly **white**,
Calling **for** my **pres**ence **and** my **voice**.

Looking to**wards** it **from** a**far**, I **think**
Of **all** the **dark**ly **clothed**, un**can**ny **shapes**
I **will** be **forced** to **walk** be**neath** and **by**,
And **dith**er, **for** my **dread** is **live** and **fierce** –

Only **when** I **call** to **mind** the **self**
I **want** to **nour**ish **and** to **one** day **be**,
And **see** my **weak**ness**es** for **what** they **are**,
Does **for**ti**tude** at **last** e**merge** and **grow**;

I **draw** my **breath**, con**sid**er **death**, and **state**:
“No **fate** can **take** a**way** our **hon**or, **if** –
We **do** the **du**ties **which** the **vio**let **flame**

De**mands** of **us** un**til** this **act** is **done**;
I **will** stay **true** un**to** the **guard's** re**quest**,
Al**though** I **think** I **may** be **maimed** or **killed**
Be**fore** I **get** to **see** the **child** I **seek**."

"But **wait –** this **is** a **dream**, I **need** not **fear** –
If I am **woun**ded **in** a **fa**tal **way**,
I **will** still **wake** and **rise** when **morn**ing **breaks**
Up**on** the **world** which **holds** my **wood**en **home** –
Or **will** I? **Could** I **die** for **re**al **here**?
Could I **per**ish **ev**er**last**ing**ly**
While **be**ing **in** a **state** of **wak**ing **sleep**?"

"Surely," **I** ex**claim**, "the **bett**er **me**
Makes **up** a **ra**di**ant** and **last**ing **flame**;
A **fall**en **em**ber **from** the **pri**mal **light**,
Cast **out** in**to** con**fu**sion **to** en**dure**
The **tri**als **which** give **rise** to **nov**el **growth** –
So **ev**en **if** my **flesh**ly **heart** falls **still**,
I **shall** yet **live**, and **be** as **safe** as **ere**
I **found** a **car**nal **dwell**ing **and** was **born**
Up**on** an **is**land **in** the **az**ure **sea**."

Con**vinced** of **grace** and **im**mor**tal**i**ty**,
I **fix** my **mind** up**on** the **dis**tant **light**,
And **lo**! A **mo**ment **la**ter, **I** am **there**,
Be**hold**ing **yet** an**oth**er **sil**ken **stone**,
Carved so **as** to **con**jure **up** i**deals**,
And **shin**ing **with** an **inn**ate **sil**ver **light**;
A **gen**tle **fe**male **face**, com**posed** and **calm**,
The **eyes** not **wide**, the **am**ple **lips** held **tight** –

“**Tem**pe**rance**? O **bless**ed **Tem**pe**rance**,
Speak to **me**, ex**plain** your **veiled** in**tent –**
For **I** have **come** here **from** an**oth**er **world**;
I **trem**ble **with** anx**ie**ty and **joy**
While **gaz**ing **at** your **no**ble, **pol**ished **face**.
“**Peace**, my **son** – speak **slow**er **and** with **care**,
There **is** no **need** to **utt**er **ma**ny **words**,
For **I** al**read**y **know** your **ev**ery **thought** –

Tempe**rance** – that **is** my **ho**ly **name**;
Re**straint** is **what** the **vul**gar **per**son **says** –
I **am** the **ne**cess**ar**y **ba**sis **for**
Dis**cov**er**ing** the S**il**ence **and** your **self**,
I **am** the **bed**rock **on** which **one** may **build**
A **dwe**lling **for** the **bless**ed, **pro**mised **child**
That **is** of **vir**gin **birth** and **high** de**scent**,
I **am** the **stone** be**low** the **House** of **Christ**,
I **am** the **first**born **of** the **vir**tues, **for**

Ending **all** in**dul**gence **op**ens **up**
The **mind** to **qui**e**tude** and **prob**ing **thought**;
It **is** the **ca**ging **of** the **gree**dy **beast**,
The **chain**ing **of** the **black** and **bawl**ing **wolf**,
And **qui**e**tude** and **con**tem**pla**tion **is**
The **start** of **search**ing **for** an **an**swer **to**
The **an**cient **and** en**dur**ing **ques**tion: “**Why**?”
And **search**ing **her**alds **the** in**cep**tion **of**
En**light**en**ment**, and **from** en**light**en**ment**
Springs **lib**e**ra**tion **and** de**liv**e**rance** –
Sal**va**tion – **which** be**gins** e**ter**nal **life**,

And **end**less **be**ing **her**alds **cla**ri**ty**,
And **cla**ri**ty** an**gel**ic, **god**ly **state**,
And **god**li**ness** the **mer**ger **of** the **spark**
With the un**end**ing **flame** from **whence** it **came**.

When **you** have **com**pre**hen**ded **this**, then **leave**;
I **can**not **tell** you **more** at **pres**ent – **leave** –
And **find** my **kin** and **do** your **best** to **grasp**
The **mag**ni**tude** of **what** they **have** to **tell**;
You **do** al**rea**dy **know** how **you** should **act**;
Speak their **names**, and **they** will **speak** to **you**;
Have **tem**pe**rance**, and **you** will **know** their **names**.

*

I **leave** the **shin**ing **stone** and **face** the **dark**;
I **walk** in**to** the **thick**, ap**pall**ing **night**,
I **feel** the **broo**ding **shapes** a**bove** my **head**,
The **bro**ken **pill**ars **and** the **gi**ant **paws**,
My **torch** is **but** a **trem**bling **light** with**in**,
My **goal** a **thing** I **do** not **think** I **know**,
And **yet**, I **walk**; I **have** no **oth**er **choice**.
An **ho**ur **pass**es, **may**be **two**, or **may**be **three** –
I **have** no **sense** of **time**, I **on**ly **feel**
A **mo**ment **of** un**end**ing **change** and **flow**,
I **know** not **where** I **am**, or **what** I **am**,
I **drift** to**wards** a **ridd**le **yet** un**solved**,
I **sink** to**wards** my **hidd**en, **ghost**ly **self**,

When **sudd**en**ly**, an**oth**er **bea**con **calls**;
It **seems** a **flick**er**ing** and **dis**tant **star**

Be**cause** of **what** its **beam** of **light** must **pass** –
“O **lov**ely **light**, you **are** dis**turbed** – by **what**?
Which eth**er**ic **bo**dies **move** be**fore**
Your **bright**ly **burn**ing, **year**ning, **liv**ing **flame**?
Are they **mere**ly **app**a**ri**tions **in**
This **mad** and **lab**y**rin**thine **in**tell**ect**,
Or **are** there **things** in **me** which **are** not **mine**?”

“You **are** in**deed** a **slight** and **wist**ful **sight**,
O **star**, o **star**, o **ti**ny, **dis**tant **star** –
But you **are** as **wild**ly **riv**et**ing**
As **an**y **quiv**er**ing** and **scar**let **sun**.”

This I **speak**, and **then** I **swift**ly **race**
Through **time** and **space** and **what** there **lies** be**tween**,
Through **dark** and **light**, in **rap**ture **and** en**trapped**,
Un**til** I **am** be**fore** the **nak**ed **source**;
A **mar**ble **man**, with **mar**ble **fold**ed **hands** –
I **hes**i**tate**, and **then** I **say** the **word**:

“**Faith**? O **bless**ed **Faith**! If **that** is **you**
Then **please** re**veal** what **plan** you **have** for **me**,
For **all** my **men**tal **fac**ul**ties** are **naught**
When **faced** with **what** my **twis**ted **sleep** has **wrought**;
A **name**less **uni**v**erse** of **ee**rie **dreams** –
Which **are** my **own**, and **yet** not **mine** at **all** –
But there is **noth**ing **I** can **say** which **is**
Not **known** by **you** since **ma**ny **years** a**go**,
Or **so** I **now** sup**pose** – if **you** are **Faith**
Then **please**, I **beg**, dis**pel** my **dread** and **speak**.”

“**Have** more **con**fi**dence**, my **bless**ed **son** –
Too **ea**si**ly** does **doubt** im**pinge** on **you** –
It **makes** you **wea**ker **than** you **ought** to **be**,
It **is** ex**cess**ive **and** en**slaves** your **mind** –
Yes, my **name** is **Faith**, you **were** cor**rect** –

I **am** the **high**est **of** the **world**’s be**liefs**,
I **am** the **gaz**ing **at** the **great**er **things**;
At **in**cor**pore**a**l**, tran**scen**dent **planes**,
And **not** the **pet**ty **and** pro**sa**ic **lanes** –

I **can**not **be** em**pir**ic **cer**tain**ty**,
I **am** the **sure**ty with**in** the **heart** –

I **am** the **wind** which **lifts** the **wing**ed **mind** –
I **an**i**mate** all **fin**er **works** of **art**,
All **com**po**si**tions **that** shall **last** and **live**
Be**yond** the **ho**urs **of** a **sin**gle **age** –
But **when** dis**tor**ted, **I** be**come** a **storm –**
Which **falls** up**on** the **world**, and **tears** a**part**
Its **life**, more **vio**lent**ly** than **an**y **gale** –

Keep me **in** your **heart**, and **I** will **be**

The **rope** to **clasp** when **all** the **things** thought **safe**
Dis**in**te**grate** and **come** to **black**ened **dust** –

The **britt**le **brid**ge on **which** you **may** at**tempt**
The **cross**ing **of** the **deep** and **cold** a**byss**,

For I **am**, and **shall** for**ev**er **be**

The **ba**sis **for** all **true** ex**pec**tan**cies**,
The **one** pro**geni**t**or** of **re**al **hope**,
The **sin**gle **key** which **fits** the **hea**vy **lock**
Pre**ven**ting **man** from **lett**ing **in** the **sun**.

I **make** the **spir**it **reach** for **high**er **planes** –
With**out** me, **man** is **mere**ly **mov**ing **clay**;
A **lump** of **soil** de**void** of **grea**ter **goals**,
And **al**so **of** a **fu**ture **past** the **cer**tain **end**;

Nothing **down** on **Earth** is **more** than **dust**,
Tempo**rar**i**ly** sol**id**i**fied**
In**to** the **shapes** and **bo**dies **which** you **see**;

The **flo**ral **win**dow **of** the **No**tre **Dame**,
The **gal**ax**y** in **which** your **plan**et **swims**,
The **count**less **peo**ple **and** their **count**less **homes** –
All are as **flee**ting **as** the **fall**ing **snow** –
No ca**the**dral, **no** as**sem**bly **deep** in **space**
Shall **ev**er **be** a **tru**ly **last**ing **thing**.

Hence, the **life** of **Man** would **not** ex**ceed**
The **lev**el **of** a **cold** and **cra**zy **game**
If **noth**ing **more** than **matt**er **filled** the **void** –

The **pres**ent **cos**mic **realm**, and **ev**ery **star**,
Shall **pass** a**way** and **be** for**ev**er **gone**;
A **fire**s**torm** shall **va**po**rize** the **Earth**,
And **black**ness **shall** en**gulf** the **jew**eled **clouds** –

But **that** on **which** the **faith**ful **brave**ly **gaze**

Shall **nev**er **pass** a**way**, but **ev**er **live**.

Now you **need** to **leave** and **seek** else**where**,
You **must** not **halt** here **long** – pass **by**, my **son –**
Pass **ev**er **by** un**til** you **find** your **goal**.”

*

A **slight**ly **less** con**fused** and **fear**ful **mind**
Sets **off** in**to** the **aw**ful **dark** a**gain**,
And **once** a**gain**, the **jour**ney **seems** to **last**
For **lon**ger **than** this **lang**uage **can** de**scribe**
In **com**pre**hen**si**ble** and **co**gent **ways**,

But **aft**er **mo**ments **of** e**ter**ni**ty**,
In **which** I **seem** to **soar** through **sor**did **realms**
More **hell**ish**ly** a**ban**doned **and** dis**turbed**
Than **an**y **I** had **seen** or **dreamed** of **ere**,
I **spot** an**oth**er **bea**con **far** a**way** –
Its **light** il**lu**mi**nates** the **ripp**les **in**
The **fab**ric **of** the **space** through **which** I **plow**,
And **bright** re**flec**tions **scatt**er **through** the **black**,
Momen**tar**i**ly** en**mesh**ing **me**
In **int**er**plays** of **blind**ing **light** and **dark** –
I **seem** to **race** through **wat**er, **but**
There **is** no **wet** or **cold** re**sis**tant **mass –**
I **seem** to **fly**, but **have** no **beat**ing **wings**.

I **anx**ious**ly** app**roach** the **dis**tant **gem**;
An**oth**er **sta**tue **of** the **fin**est **stone**;
A **child wait**ing for **some**thing **fresh** and **new**,

Shining **like** the **white** of **san**guine **flames**.

“Cor**rect** me **if** I **am** de**lu**ded, **but**
Something **tells** me **that** your **name** is **Hope**!”

“My **wea**ry **friend**! You **have** not **been** de**ceived –**
You **see** a **child** be**fore** you **since** to **you**
A **child** is **that** which **best** em**bo**dies **Hope** –
And **Hope** I **am**, and **shall** for**ev**er **be** –
I **am** the **loam** in **which** the **seed** of **Love**
May **sprout** and **morph** in**to** a **thri**ving **tree**
With **far**-flung **roots** and **rip**ened, **mell**ow **fruit –**

With**out** me, **there** can **be** no **re**al **love**,
And **neith**er **an**y **rich** and **heart**felt **joy**,
Only **dis**il**lu**sioned **mo**tion, **filled**
By **want** for **flesh**ly, **shor**t-lived **plea**sure, **or**
A **short** re**prieve** from **nagg**ing, **pain**ful **thoughts**.

Let me **ask** you: **How** may **Love** a**rise**
If **your** con**vic**tion **is** that **noth**ing **lasts**?

Every **per**son **longs** for **last**ing **things**,
Even **those** who **do** not **know** they **do**,

But **if** he **thinks** that **I** am **but** a **lie**;
A **pretty** **mist** dis**pelled** by **rea**son’s **light**,
His **heart** grows **so**ur **with** the **cold** re**gret**
Which **flows** like **ac**id **from** the **tor**tured **dreams**
Which **he** thinks **nev**er **will** see **spring** and **bloom**
But his **bitt**er, **dis**con**tent**ed **state**

May **still** be **hidd**en **from** his **narr**ow **self**.

Such **deep** re**gret**, if **left** to **swell** un**checked**
En**gen**ders **poi**son**ing** of **mind** and **soul**
And **ul**ti**mat**ely **leads** to **vic**ious **deeds** –
Which **con**sti**tute** the **road** to **cer**tain **death**;
Ex**tinc**tion **of** the **em**ber **deep** with**in**;
A **sore** and **irre**v**oc**a**ble** de**mise**.

The **i**ro**ny** in **this** is **clear** to **those**
Who **know** with**in** their **hearts** the **sac**red **truth**:
Be**cause** the **dis**en**chan**ted **has** no **Hope**,
He **loo**ses **ev**ery **hope** he **could** have **had**.
You may **call** it **tra**gic, **and** ex**claim**:
"**How** could the **Great** De**sig**ner **make** such **schemes**?
I look **on** with **pit**y, **but** I **say**
It **is** the **un**a**void**a**ble** re**ward**
Of **he** who **ev**er **fails** to **trust** in **God**.

Now I must **ask** you to **leave** and **move on**;
What you **need** to **keep** in **mind** is **this,**
My **friend**: There **can**not be **Love with**out **Hope**!"

I **heed** the **words** I **hear** with**in** my **dream**,
I **bid** the **boy** good**bye** and **face** the **dark**,
I **shiv**er **as** I **sense** the **light** grow **faint**
And **sink** in**to** the **night** be**hind** my **back**,
And **once** a**gain** I **am** a**lone**, a**lone** –
But **now** my **torch** is **brigh**ter **than** be**fore**
And **high** a**bove**, the **dark** is **not** a **void**
But **skies**, **brimm**ing with **stars**, **heav**ing with **life** –

And **I** am **less** a**fraid** of **what** might **come**.

*

Silence. **Still**ness. **Drift**. I **soar** in **awe**
Through the **wild maze** of a **deep**ening **dream**,
My **pul**sing **heart** ex**plo**ding **qui**et**ly**
Through **e**ons, **through mind**sets **humm**ing in **space**,
My **crazed self morp**hing through **lay**ers un**seen**,
Mired **in** a **gulf** of **rag**ing **sleep**.

*

“O **Love**! If **you** are **Love**, then **please** do **speak**,”
I **call**, as **I** am **gaz**ing **up**ward **from**
The **pol**ished **feet** of **some**thing **huge** and **white** –
A **la**dy, **draped** in **lus**trous **mar**ble **silk**,
Tower**ing** a**bove** my **hum**bled **ghost** –
Her **love**ly **no**ble **head** so **far** from **me**
That **I** can **scarce**ly **see** it **clear**ly, **but**
I **glimpse** the **out**line **of** a **migh**ty **crown**,

And **in** her **left**, up**lif**ted **hand** she **holds**
A **flam**ing **heart**, en**light**en**ing** it **all**;
The **al**a**bas**ter **col**umns **and** the **clouds**
Of **am**e**thys**tine **vel**vet, **preg**nant **with**
The **em**bry**os** of **thou**sand **un**born **stars** –
I **kneel** be**fore** these **feet** and **ask** a**gain**:
“O **Love**! If **you** are **Love**, then **please** do **speak**,
For **I** am **from** a **place** where **Love** is **lost**
In **mis**con**cep**tions **spread** by **haugh**ty **fools –**

Then **sudd**en**ly**, I **hear** a **dazz**ling **voice**;
Soft as the **sur**face **of** a **tran**quil **flame**,
Burning **gent**ly **through** a **sor**did **veil**:

“Be**lov**ed **guest**, you **spoke** my **name** with **ease**;
You **did** in**deed** pro**nounce** my **ho**ly **name** –
I **am** the **force** that **goes** be**yond** it **all**
And **rea**ches **far** in**to** the **bless**ed **realms**,
I **am** ex**al**ted **light**, and **prec**ious **stone**,

Which, in **time**, al**lows** the **mak**ing **of**
Im**mor**tal **gold** from **gray** and **bur**dened **clay –**
The **ones** who **have** a**band**oned **me** for **good**
Shall **not** be **helped**, no **matt**er **what** they **try**,
But **all** the **ones** who **have** me **shall** be **saved**
E**ven**tu**al**ly, **ev**en **if** they **sin** –
You **know** the **Lu**men **Mun**di **did** ex**claim**:
‘Love the **Lord** your **God** with **all** your **heart**
And **all** your **soul**, and **all** your **mind**,
And **love** your **eve**ry **neigh**bor **as** your**self**.’
Etch these **words** in**to** the **last**ing **you** –
I **do** not **need** to **say** an**oth**er **word**
For **all** the **rest** is **al**so **writt**en **down**:
‘**Lo**, I **am** for**ev**er **with** you, **ev**en **till**,
The **day** when **what** you **know** must **cease** to **be**.’

For a **while**, I **ling**er, **gaz**ing at **her**
Imm**ense** and **light**-e**mitt**ing **scul**pted **robe**,
Which is **scin**till**a**ting **in** a **strange**
And **hiss**ing **fash**ion, as **if** the **sol**id **stone**

Is **but** a **sheet** of **ice** in **spring**time **sun**,
Be**hind** which **flows** a **hun**dred **liv**ing **streams –**
But the **flame** that **was** her **voice** has **gone –**

And **so**, I **leave**, but **now** I **am** a**glow**
With **ev**ery**thing** that **I** have **found** and **felt –**
And I **muse** that **I** have **found** far **more**
Than **that** which **has** at **pre**sent **sur**faced **on**
The **lake** on **which** the **bloss**om **of** my **mind**
Is **flo**ating, **breath**ing **in** the **shift**ing **winds** –

An **ech**o **of** the **voice** I **heard** still **says**:
“I **am** for**ev**er **with** you, **ev**en **till** –”
Is **he** for**ev**er **in** me, **wai**ting **for**
The **mo**ment **when** this **I** and **all** my **world**
Is **bur**ied, **and** a **vir**gin **soil** is **formed**,
From **which** his **win**ged **phoe**nix **may** a**rise**?

*

I **gaze** up**on** my **wak**ing **dream** with **Love**
For **that** which **I** now **know** is **great** and **true**
And **lo**, the **dream** be**gins** to **bend** and **change –**
The **fab**ric **of** its **struc**tures **bulge** and **stir**,
The **dark**ness **melts** and **on**ly **light** re**mains –**
And a **hund**red **yards** be**fore** me, **where**
A **col**umned **path**way **ends**, a **gia**nt **vault**,
Ex**ten**ding **far** in**to** the **hea**ving **skies**,
Is **op**en **to** my **sight** and **show**ing **forth**
A **tri**ad **of** three **bright** and **gold**en **white**
For**ma**tions – **per**sons – **and** yet **not** at **all** –

A **knight** in **ar**mor – **with** a **rea**dy **sword –**
The **tip** of **which** is **rest**ing **at** a **point**
A**bove** his **wide**, en**chan**ting **mar**ble **eyes –**
Courage **is** his **name**, and **this** he **speaks**:
“If **Love** should **fail**, I **would** col**lapse** and **die**!”
And **next** to **him**, a **state**ly **wo**man **says**
“And **I** would **crum**ble, **were** it **not** for **Love**
And **Cou**rage – **she** is **Pru**dence, **and** she **keeps**
Her **right** hand **on** her **chest**, a**bove** her **heart**,
And **in** her **left**, she **holds** a **pol**ished **plate**
Up**on** which **rests** a **swan** with **out**stretched **neck**,
And **in** the **stone** it**self**, it **seems**, a **star**
With **sev**en slender **points** and **sev**en **rays**
Ex**tends** un**to** the **roun**ded **tab**let **edge**.

But **on** a **po**di**um** be**hind** the **coup**le **stands**
An **old**, but **vi**tal **man**, whose **beard** has **grown**
To **reach** his **na**ked **feet**, all **mar**vel**ous**ly **carved**
In **glea**ming **stone**, **fin**er than **an**y **I**
Have **ev**er **wit**nessed **when** a**wake** on **Earth**,
And **in** his **firm**ly **closed sin**istral **hand**,
A **shaft** be**long**ing **to** a **ham**mer **sits**,
While the **hamm**er **head** is **gent**ly **kissed**
By **full** and **soft**ly **wrink**led **mar**ble **lips**.
Justice **is** his **name –** I **hear**ken **to**
His **word**less, **stirr**ing **voice**, as **he** ex**plains**
That **he** is **utt**er**ly** de**pen**dent **on**
The **bless**ed **pair** be**fore** him **and** on **Love –**
If **an**y **of** these **three** did **fall**, then **so**
Would **he** – but **they** will **nev**er **fall –** for **this**

En**tranc**ing **vis**ion **is** the **lof**ty **realm**
Of **high** i**deas**, which **may** be **left** and **lost**
By **those** who **move** with**in** the **mor**tal **planes**,
But **nev**er **dies** – and **so** I **wake**,
For a **mo**ment **fall**ing, **I** be**lieve**,
To**wards** the **sto**ny **floor** be**side** my **bed –**
I **try** to **clasp** a **some**thing, **but** can**not** –
I **fear** the **fall** will **break** me, **and** re**sist –**
And **then** I **rise** ab**rupt**ly **from** the **sleep**
As **if** e**lec**tric **shocks** just **hit** my **chest**,
But **I** am **sitt**ing **safe**ly **in** my **bed –**

Back in the **world** where **high** i**deas** once **thrived**,
Back in the **world** that **has** a**ban**doned **them**
To **gain** a **free**dom **of** a **ghast**ly **kind** –
Back in the **ma**trix **of** im**pu**dent **thought**,
Back from the **realm** of **which** I **ev**er **dream**,
Back in the **dream** I **would** pre**fer** to **leave**.

Edmund Schilvold, January 21, 2010